

13

Coda

Whilst we are interested in the future of Sociology and its ongoing relationships with Philosophy, the natural sciences, and other disciplines, it is Ethnomethodology we care about and its future we are concerned for. That future looks uncertain. We have commented in other places on the institutional and academic context in which the discipline finds itself and the constraints and opportunities afforded therein. For the early-stage ethnomethodologist, a career within a Sociology Department has become increasingly less likely. Even for those who do manage to find such positions, combining the demands of teaching with research may be prohibitive. In this Coda to our Swansong, we set these important matters aside for a moment and turn back to the discipline's intellectual environment and the disciplinary choices Ethnomethodology faces.

The crux concerns cross and inter-disciplinary relations and the probability Ethnomethodology's distinctive and guiding tenets will bleed out if closer and closer relations are sought with disciplines which do not share those pre-suppositions. Two potential alliances seem to be on the table: with natural sciences and with social sciences. The option of the natural sciences can be dealt with quite quickly. Achieving the kind of hybrid relationship to which Garfinkel aspired seems a long way off. Satisfying its requirements would make extraordinary demands on ethnomethodological researchers. We see no evidence these demands will be satisfied in the near or medium term. The social sciences are different. Adherence to its own tenets is what guarantees Ethnomethodology's character as an *alternate* sociology. However, Sociology has its own family resemblances as well as sibling rivalries with Psychology, Economics, Social History, Management Science, Linguistics and so on. These lines of commonality and disjuncture mean if

Ethnomethodology continues to seek closer alignment with Sociology, we see little chance it will be able to avoid the mishaps of methodological graft failure, the re-tuning of epistemic values, a constant plying of disciplinary relevances and the pushes and pulls of initial success which we suggested had plagued Institutional Ethnography.

Here's the rub. When we look across the field broadly defined by Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis, we see little evidence of any interest in, let alone continuing investigative struggle with the two defining themes we believe characterise the broad discipline as an alternate sociology: commitment to faithfulness to the actor's point of view and determination to place the observer/analyst within the analytic frame of reference. Look where we will, in the plethora of studies of leisure activities, work settings, bench science, medical practise, family life, classrooms, control centres, welfare agencies and so on and so on, we find minimal or no exploration of these questions. It is as if the community thinks the central challenges have been addressed and their practical investigative implications resolved. As we have tried to show in the essays in Parts Three and Four of this collection, this is far from the case. True, progress has been made. But only in fits and starts and only to a limited extent. Implementable disciplinary-wide programmes couched as project level investigative protocols (in other words, self-consciously reflexive characterisations of the 'methods' in the 'methodology') are wholly missing. In their stead, we have weakly-informed and overly optimistic reliance on a few analytic tropes and related data collecting instruments both of which have been culled from a small set of exemplar investigations. Ask yourself this. Where would most contemporary ethnomethodological investigations be without the near ubiquitous use of the Jeffersonian transcript (or some version of it) as the representational device around which to organise collections of noticings about social settings? What is the basis for assuming a transcript provides the best (or perhaps the only) account on which to rest an analysis?¹ Moreover, where in this usage is the researcher-as-transcriber? Even more important, where is the investigator *in the analysis*? What has happened to the locally embedded, endogenously produced representations of the action in flow available to those in the setting? Where are the analyses of them? And if they were to be used, how would the adequacy of those analyses be grounded?

Could it be that the alacrity with which members of the ethnomethodological community and those in communities taking leadership from Ethnomethodology, have turned to accommodation, integration or even assimilation within social science disciplines, is telling us the

¹ The use of the transcript as a device for reasoning about talk in Conversation Analysis is a separate question. But it, too, has remained largely unexamined.

decisive severing implied by adherence to Ethnomethodology's incommensurability and its commitment to working out in all its detail the requirements for an alternate sociology, never really took hold? If so, this might account for why so much of Ethnomethodology's practise as a practical investigative sociology continues to rely on standard, empiricist-inspired sociological mechanisms for reasoning from data to phenomena and onwards to findings. Note the quantifier. We are not saying all Ethnomethodology is like this; but a great deal of it is. Filter out the emblematic vocabulary and obligatory referential gestures, and the analyses seem very little different to those offered in mainstream social sciences.

No doubt this suggestion will cause heartburn and increased blood pressure among many colleagues and friends. But, given reflection, it really needn't. If Ethnomethodology has demonstrated anything, it is that all special modalities of social life (academic disciplines, professional occupations, and other finite provinces of meaning) can be construed as being rooted in local concatenations of domain and commonsense reasoning. They rely on these melded methods to sense assemble the worlds in which their provinces of meaning are immersed. Ethnomethodology emerged from 'common sense sociology'—the routine, taken for granted, quotidian practices of conventional sociological analysis—and so it should not be surprising that without constant self-vigilance, there would be a tendency to a recidivism and the use of these methods carried through into its own practise. Reliance on the common sense reasoning out of which a discipline emerged is, after all, precisely what Ethnomethodology has revealed at the heart of bench science, medical practice, organisational life, leisure activities, software engineering and endlessly on. It has also been our own finding about different forms of sociologising, including examples of work originating in Ethnomethodology itself.

It is against this background that we make our suggestion concerning the choices the discipline faces. If grounding Ethnomethodology as a substantive alternate to conventional Sociology is still the overriding objective, then we need to look to look anew at the modes of reasoning we operate with. It is precisely to such modes our suggestions for reading sociologically and investigating sociologically have been addressed. As an alternate sociology, Ethnomethodology must deploy entirely new and different ways of turning to the social world; ways which place the investigator at the heart of the frame of reference and which do not rely on methods premised in the adoption of decontextualised and abstracted systems of categorisation. Ethnomethodological descriptions of the particular and its typologies of general forms derived from them, must preserve the structure of the social actor's experience as part and parcel of the sociologically constituted objects being subjected to analysis. Colleagues and friends are urging

the community to return to the beginnings and re-forge the discipline. We have a lot of sympathy with that plea. But the repetition of history as farce can only be avoided if, in doing so, we ensure things are done somewhat differently next time.

Of course, grounding Ethnomethodology as a substantive alternate to conventional Sociology may no longer be the overriding objective. But, if that is the case, couldn't we save a lot of time, angst and ill-temper just by saying so?